

Noelle: And I am Noelle King; good morning. There are 25,000 National Guard troops in Washington D.C to secure Joe Biden's inauguration. By way of comparison, there were 8,000 at President Trump's. Authorities at the Capitol are on high alert, among their concerns; a remarkable one. The possibility of an insider attack, a threat from service members. The FBI is vetting all of the National Guard troops who have come to the city. With me now, Lieutenant General Mark Sasseville, who is Vice Chief of the National Guard Bureau. Good morning to you, sir.

Lt. Gen. Sasseville: Good morning, Noelle. Thank you for having me.

Noelle: We are happy to have you. Why are National Guard troops being vetted before the inauguration?

Lt. Gen. Sasseville: So, let me start by making sure that everybody understands there is no room for extremism in our ranks. I do not think I have to say that, but I will anyway. All the men and women that have joined the National Guard have a deep desire to serve and they are proud of their service.

The kind of vetting that is actually happening now is routine for inaugurations. I am a D.C. Guardsman myself. I have been in about four when I was still in the unit and every one of these, there's been an extra level of security. So, this is not something that is unusual for these types of events.

And so, we have been asked to partner with the FBI; they are one of a handful of our partners here, for this event, obviously. So, we are doing an extra level of scrutiny to make sure that we have that extra layer of protection. We do not have any signaling or indications that there is a problem, but we just want to be on the safe side.

As the 25,000 soldiers and airmen process in, they are getting an extra reminder to – if you see something, say something and refer that up through the chain of command.

But routinely, I would like to also mention that we have standing procedures, and it is not just for the inauguration. It is a day-to-day process that we go through with our Adjutants General in the states to see if there are any concerns. If there are, they are flagged to the Adjutants General and he/she will conduct an investigation or an inquiry.

If the situation warrants, they will refer it to the FBI.

Noelle: Can you describe how – yes it sounds like what you are saying is; you are not seeing at this time, any added risk of an inside attack. Vetting is normal, there will be some amount of extra vetting this year, given the circumstances. Can you describe how the vetting works? What, what actually happens? What are you looking for?

Lt. Gen. Sasseville: Well, so I would have to refer you to the FBI for the specifics. I am not sure exactly what it is that they do. But they – on our behalf, they are going through that and looking at I presume a database, but I have to refer to them for exactly what it is that they are they are looking for.

Noelle: Okay.

Lt. Gen. Sasseville: And – yeah.

Noelle: I, I was walking in the park near my house, the other day – yesterday, in fact. And I saw several National Guardsmen, uh, and it made me wonder, I mean it is not a familiar sight in Washington D.C, not in the neighborhood where I live. Could you describe how the National Guard is being equipped to keep this inauguration secure?

Lt. Gen. Sasseville: So, that is a great question. It depends on the mission. Again, we are here in support of law enforcement. So, the equipment depends on the mission that we have been asked to do and we coordinate very closely with all of our partners the Metro PD, Capitol Police, Park Police, Secret Service.

I have seen the plan. It is a good plan. They have a handful of missions that they have asked us to do and depending upon exactly what it is and what we are doing, is how we will be equipped.

So, you will see some folks with what we call civil disturbance gear, which is the helmet and the shields, and you saw some of that on TV recently. There they will be some soldiers and airmen with weapons and then they will be some without weapons. So, it really depends on what we are being asked to do.

Noelle: And what are they prepared for, in general? And how is that different this year, given what happened at the Capitol, on January 6th?

Lt. Gen. Sasseville: So, we are prepared for the worst and expecting the best. We are closely aligned with the FBI and law enforcement to understand, if there is any, where the disturbances might come from and if anybody wants to have unlawful protests.

So, that is really what we are keeping an eye out for. Our missions are across the board, security, crowd control, traffic control, and several other supporting efforts. But, we are hopeful. We are hoping for a peaceful transition of political authority on the 20th. And hopefully, everything goes well.

Noelle: In the seconds we have left, may I ask when does everyone goes home?

Lt. Gen. Sasseville: Well, that is a great question. It will be conditions-based. I think we have to wait and see. When we are no longer needed and no longer requested by the authorities, we will leave here in an expeditious manner or as directed.

Noelle: All right, Lieutenant General Mark Sasseville, Vice Chief of the National Guard Bureau. Thank you, sir.

Lt. Gen. Sasseville: Absolutely, thank you.

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Duration: 9 minutes
